Section Three

Supporting Reading Instruction: Serving Early Elementary School Students

Literacy notes for libraries serving children during their early elementary school years

When children enter school and formal reading instruction begins, supporting them as they learn to read offers a great opportunity for libraries that support literacy.

Ultimately the components of reading must work as a whole process resulting in the reader making meaning from the language the text represents. The process is complex (although some children grasp it so quickly it hardly seems so). Educators still argue about exactly how reading skill develops and whether it works the same for all children. People who study or teach the process often focus in turn on one or another aspect of the process in an effort to understand the complexities and make the process manageable. A brief overview of some of the terms and concepts they use may be helpful.

First, readers must be able to get from the print to the language it represents. Often this is called the decoding process. In most school systems, first grade focuses on the decoding process. We don't have all the answers yet on why this process is so easy for some children and why the whole reading process breaks down here for others, but active study of the problem continues. In English (and many other languages) there is a correlation between the sounds of the language and the letter symbols. Phonics is the specific teaching of the relationship between the sounds and letters. But the decoding part of reading involves more than knowing the correlation. It depends on the ability to match the letters to the right sounds, to then combine the individual sounds into syllables and words quickly enough to recognize not only the words represented by the letters but the flow of all the words. If figuring out what words the letters represent is a slow laborious process, meaning gets lost in the effort.

Teachers also talk about word analysis, which is sometimes defined as phonics and otherwise as being able to recognize plurals, regular past tenses, etc. of known words.

Decoding also involves some isolated word recognition. Sight words are the small common words that often don't follow the patterns of phonics very well. They must simply be practiced until they can be instantly recognized in any context. They also include some environmental print; that is, words on signs and labels that surround us but sometimes don't give us much context to help us figure out what the words are.

Materials for beginning readers assume children are familiar with the words in the book, but don't know what those words look like in print. Children who don't know the words at all are faced with the double task of learning the vocabulary while learning the print connection, and the print connection doesn't make much sense if they don't know the words anyway. So children who enter school without good vocabularies or without adequate language development start out behind; statistics report that many of them never catch up.

After readers know what words the print represents, they must understand the message, often on more than one level, and construct some sort of meaning from the words and phrases of the text. Teachers usually call this part of the process comprehension. They talk about different types or

levels of comprehension ranging from the basic task of understanding what the author said, to analyzing and evaluating and making personal connections. The point in all reading is, of course, meaning. For many new readers, especially those with well-developed language and familiarity with books and stories, getting meaning seems automatic once they know what the words are. For others, understanding and constructing meaning from written text is a struggle. Still others have adequate literal comprehension; that is, they can tell what the author's message is if the text is straightforward, but somehow they do not catch subtleties like sarcasm, and they cannot (or do not) evaluate or infer or see contradictions or make any personal meaning from the message of the text.

Study, argument, and interest in the reading process continue. Despite the claims of some groups, all the answers are not in. Many children, over half of them in most places, learn to read no matter how they are taught. But we know enough to see how libraries can support the literacy process and make a difference in the literacy levels children attain. Almost everyone agrees that exposing children to print early, often, and in happy ways helps the process along and may even be essential. So libraries are already helping developing readers before they enter school. Libraries can continue to support learners in the early stage of formal reading instruction through both the print collection and programming.

The Collection

Reading historian and researcher Nila Banton Smith observed that the evolving story of reading instruction has been to fill the gap between single words and great literature with texts to support the developing reader. This observation stakes out a territory for libraries. The library collection can be of enormous help to beginning readers who simply need to practice reading enough to get good at it.

The array of early reading books from which to choose is growing constantly. Typically, books useful for children in the early stages of reading acquisition depend on some combination of three features to keep young readers from being overwhelmed and help them learn the whole reading process in manageable increments. They are illustration, decidability, and predictability.

The first feature of books for new readers is usually bright and interesting pictures. The pictures serve as context to help children get meaning and to clarify the meaning of scant text. Pictures also serve to make the books attractive and interesting and encourage children to actually practice reading. Pictures also send other messages. Books picturing a variety of people of all ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds are also important to send the message that literacy is valuable for everyone and can be part of everybody's world.

A second way authors write for beginning readers is to choose the words they use for their "decodability;" that is, they use words based on how "easy" the words are. Writers may control their vocabularies, limiting themselves to words beginning readers are likely to know or find easy to decode. This can backfire if the author limits the permissible words so tightly that he or she can't tell the story coherently; a vocabulary that is too restricted can make the reading task harder. Many authors use a combination of text and picture to tell a story with few words.

A third technique authors use to help beginning readers read their books successfully is predictability. Writers use features such as rhyme, pattern, repetition, illustrations, and predictability of the storyline to help young readers understand the story being told without overwhelming them while they build children's facility for written language. Librarians can look for these features as they make decisions about the collection.

Researchers agree practice counts, and simply reading what they can read makes children better readers. If libraries can give new readers access to a multitude of attractive, motivating books, that service increases the chance new readers will progress and become skillful independent readers.

Reading teachers call the words we see around us in signs and labels and other places environmental print. Librarians can label objects in your children's area or adding cues like pictures to signs at the library to help young readers understand what words mean and get used to the idea that signs around them tell them things. (In the process we train them as library patrons since we make much use of signage in our buildings.)

Libraries are also helping children manage print by adding software to help children practice reading components to their software collections. Some libraries add word games and activity books to the collection. While word activities are not reading in the fullest meaning sense, they do help some children get enough practice "breaking the code" that they can move on to fuller reading experiences.

Yet another way the library can use the collection to support developing readers is to add materials to the adult collection that help parents understand how to support the reading process and what to do if their children have reading problems. Research and experience continue to indicate parents provide experiences that are the basis for reading achievement. Providing parents with information about that role is an important literacy service.

Programming

Library programming can also be crafted to include literacy support.

Continue story times and continue reading aloud to children who are learning to read on their own. This bridges the gap between what they can understand and what they can read for themselves. It keeps them interested in reading and books. It helps them look forward to what they will be able to do when they get better at reading. It continues to help them grow in vocabulary and language and background knowledge, which are all important components of the reading process. It helps them figure out what books they want to read when they get better at it.

When a librarian reads to young children he or she can help by running a finger under the lines of print to help the children follow the words. Some books also have repeated words or phrases that can be copied onto a poster so that the group can read aloud together each time they appear.

Nothing is wrong with crafts or videos after a storytime reading, but there are other activities that can help literacy skills directly. Any activity that helps develop language, vocabulary, or word

recognition helps children be better readers. Anything that encourages children to re-read or retell, or write or discuss in response to a book or an experience, is a literacy activity.

Rereading familiar text helps children become better readers in these early stages. If the story time book is one that children may be able to handle after hearing it, try reading it again with group involvement. Even if the full text is beyond beginning readers, there might be repeated phrases that could be lettered on a sign, and children could read them chorally each time they occur. If the story has dialog, the librarian might read the narrative and assign small groups to read the parts of different characters. (If a group is reading chorally the more confident and able readers pull the others along and spare individuals any embarrassment.) Poetry lends itself to choral reading and group dramatic readings; try a poem related to the book just read.

Programs for these early readers can include brief game-like practice with sounds and letters in a context. There are examples of these in this handbook.

Librarians can help new readers improve all-important reading comprehension through activities like retelling, acting out, discussing, and imagining new endings or details. Props that may help are puppets, flannel boards with cutouts, dry erase boards and pens. Pieces of costumes or props related to the theme or events of a story may help acting out or retelling. Sheets of poster board put together with notebook rings like a giant book, along with markers or other writing supplies can also be used to make a new big book to follow up on the original story. Members of a slightly older group might create a brief monologue explaining to the audience how a character in the book felt. They might use puppets to present the thoughts, or a pretend newscaster could do interviews. Any activity that focuses on what the story said and how the listeners/readers reacted helps comprehension.

Creative writing is a valuable activity to increase and encourage literacy. Libraries can encourage children to write even while they are in the early stages of literacy. Although the time limits of a story hour preclude having children write extended narratives, even brief writing helps. Perhaps children could make greeting cards or signs with mottos from a book they have heard. Groups might write or tell a different version of the story. The library might provide a story starter or homemade blank book for children to take home and finish. Many poetry forms are available to inspire writing brief poems that can be copied onto fancy paper or decorated, and then posted on the bulletin board or taken proudly home. Summer programming when children can stay in the library longer might include a young authors' summer club or an afternoon of making books at the library. A few fortunate libraries may find a volunteer who comes often to write down what young authors dictate and helps them read it back and turn it into a finished form.

It is vital to continue to read aloud, tell stories, and do other pleasant things with books and children. Children can understand stories far beyond their reading level and benefit from seeing where they are going in the reading process. Hearing stories beyond their reading ability gives them a head start in comprehension and making meaning. Offering interesting and attractive texts helps children want to read. Giving them whatever success and encouragement we can keeps them reading what they can manage, and if they continue reading their reading skill keeps improving.

Summer reading is an especially valuable literacy tool after first and second grades because it helps children hold on to the instruction they have received, and practice the parts of the reading process they have learned. (Then after third and fourth grades, summer reading helps them become independent readers at their own levels and practice reading until it comes easily). The fun of summer reading is also important to children who may be finding learning to read very hard work.

Reading is difficult for some learners and some of them resist the effort. Often the children who resist reading are the ones having trouble with the process. (It should be noted that it might take more than effort for some children to become good readers.) While some researchers argue about the value of independent reading as an instructional strategy, once the reading process is in place most children enhance it by time spent reading. Unfortunately, the children who need the practice most may resist it most. For new readers and struggling readers, libraries can help by making reading worth the effort. Anything that engages a child in reading or exposes a child to pleasant reading activities contributes to reading skill.

Motivation is important to keep children reading until they get good at it. Libraries have traditionally been quite good at providing motivation through both programming and the attraction of a broad, appealing collection. The best motivation comes from inside people, so incentive programs are controversial, but many schools, libraries, and children's programs use them. We hope that extrinsic motivation will be temporary and children will discover that reading is meaningful and interesting and move on to inner motivation. We build intrinsic motivation by giving children good experiences with reading, something libraries have been doing for a long time now.

Libraries are perfectly placed to help children who are learning to read move on to full literacy.

Activity Notes

AN ALPHABET LETTER GAME

Supplies:

- 1 plastic jar (at least quart size) with lid
- 26 small wooden blocks; slips of construction paper can be used also.
- Label each block/slip of paper with a letter from the alphabet using only one letter per block/slip of paper. (Blocks are available at some education supply stores with letters already embossed on them.)
- Put some of the letter blocks or slips in the jar. It is not necessary to use all letters in any one session, but there should be only one of each letter.
- Index cards and tape or name badges to label objects in the room.

Instructions:

- Label items in the library or meeting room, using index cards or name badges and being sure there are several labels beginning with each letter that is in the jar.
- The first letter of each word can be bold print to help children recognize it.
- Let each child shake the jar and close his eyes while he selects a block/slip of paper.
- Then let the children search the classroom for labeled items that are spelled beginning with the letter they selected.
- Instruct the children to pull the labels off the items they find so they can turn in the number of items they found.
- When finished, let children share their letter and share the names of all the items they found. The librarian may have to help with the reading once the labels are detached from the objects, but the child can indicate the object in the room. This reinforces the idea that words stand for things.
- While children may not be able to read all the words, finding the items helps them understand what the word means, and how to spell the word as it is listed on the label.

Purposes:

- Recognizing letters, individually and in words
- Reinforcing that words stand for things
- Enhancing a child's ability to learn/identify new words and objects, understand their meaning, and ultimately read/spell new words.
- Supporting letter recognition, phonics, and vocabulary instruction.

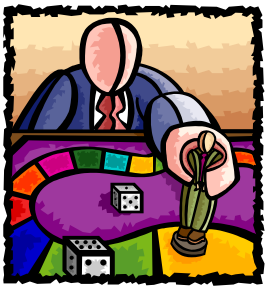
Follow-up Activities:

Librarians can create word study lists or posters from all the labels for the items the children found. Examples: A= apple, B=book, C=computer, D=desk, and so on. Then in a later session pictures of the objects can be put next to the words on the list. Older children can re-label the objects.

Phyllis Harris, LIFT-Missouri

For your game shelf

There are commercial word games and computer games for new readers. These can be added to your collection and loaded on your computers. While some educators argue that word drills are not reading in the important sense of making meaning, they will help some children "break the code" and learn to handle print well enough to make meaning in response to what they read.



If you keep regular table games in the library for children to use, you can modify other games into word games. Replace the cards in *Candyland* with cards that have the words for the colors or the chart in *Cootie* with one that says "leg" instead of the picture. Making such games can also become an activity for a children's program or something older children can do for younger ones.

Flashcards and computer drills can work like games for children. Volunteers and older children can help younger ones.

If new and more experienced readers are playing a game together, the new readers are at a disadvantage with scoring. When you include these games in your library programming or help children play them independently, you can have "library scoring." Alter the scoring in traditional word games such as *Scrabble* and go for the total group score or session score by adding up everyone's words in the same column. You can also keep a log or poster where everyone who plays puts their own score and try to hit a certain cumulative group score by a certain date. You can also have children play as teams with new and more experienced readers together on the same team.

Using accordion folded strips of cardstock for make-it-yourself children's books

The preparation for these easy book blanks is simple. Use the long edge of a sheet of poster board, cover stock, or cardstock. Cut a strip and pleat it at even intervals. Turn the pleated strip so the back of the first 'page' forms the cover and the spaces between the folds form pages. Decide how wide the pages will be based in on the age of the child and the length of the sheet of material. For example, the 24" edge of a sheet of cover stock will give you eight 3" 'pages' when pleated at three-inch intervals or six 4" pages pleated at four-inch intervals. In general these will be small books, good for little hands, but you could cut and pleat a strip to give you a tall skinny book or tape sheets together to make a bigger book. The pleated strips may be turned vertically or horizontally. Horizontally they seem more like a book; vertically they open up almost like a narrow banner.

Accordion books lend themselves well to category or picture books that can be completed in a sitting. They are also good practice device for word lists for beginning readers. Some open-ended suggestions for topics are:

- Our families – Dad, Grandma, Keisha, Allan, etc.; each get a "page"
- Our pets or our friends – real or imaginary
- Colors - to practice reading color words
- Favorite things
- Holidays
- Any category of objects that can be described with a many
- Different words: short snowman, tall snowman, new snowman, old snowman, etc.; big fish, little fish, goldfish, green fish etc.; spotted dog, furry dog, smooth dog etc.; happy face, sad face, dirty face, mad face, girl face, guy face, nice face, my face – you get the picture
- word families, one picture per page – cat, bat, rat, mat, etc.; Jack, pack, black, tack, etc.; mall, ball, hall, wall, tall, small, etc.

A variation on this is to use stickers as the inspiration and illustrations. Three-inch strips folded at 3" intervals make a good size to hold a sticker and a few words. The stickers you supply suggest the subjects of the books. School supply and craft stores often have a huge variety to choose from. A series of pictures of a character might yield word books with entries like "Garfield… looking… reading… running… sleeping… eating." A series with farm animals might be used with simple labeling or the words to "old McDonald." Holiday series are easy: "At my house at Christmas I can see…presents…a star…some candles…a tree…"and so on. Mini stickers make good number books.

Many children's workers also enjoy helping children make spin-offs of favorite published books using repetitive or patterned text, either using stickers or letting children draw pictures. The adult may have to supply (perhaps even pre-print) the text but the child chooses and perhaps prints each new entry. Some books that lend themselves to this are *Brown Bear*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, and *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*.

Theme Letter Calendar For Story Hour

Supplies Needed:

- One large wall calendar or poster boards to draw a large calendar
- Set of colored markers
- Objects to be matched to letter sounds, different each week

Instructions:

- On the large calendar, outline or highlight the square for when that day's story hour is held.
- If days or the week are not labeled, label them and accent the day of the week on which story time occurs.
- Label each square for a story-hour day with one letter in very large print, or glue cut out letters to the calendar. Depending on the story hour schedule, you may choose to do a letter a week to get through the whole alphabet in a season, or you may choose to repeat letters to spread the letters across story hour sessions for the year. You may want to use only consonants, since consonants have more regular sound patterns than vowels, fewer words begin with vowels, and using only consonants might let you get through the alphabet twice in a season.
- Start each story hour by showing the calendar and introducing the theme letter for the day. Say the letter to the children, and pronounce the letter sound. Ask the children to repeat the name of the letter and make the sound also.
- Place items around the meeting room or library that begin with the letter targeted that week. Each week, ask children to find the items that go with the week's letter, say what the item is, and make the letter sound when pronouncing the word.
- A different letter will serve as the theme for each story time. This letter activity will provide an introductory activity to each story time through the year.
- While you will not want to limit story time to books and activities emphasizing the week's letter, sometimes the story or illustrations in the book correlate with the theme letter of the week and this may be emphasized when it happens.
- Activities following the story may also be about the theme letter when appropriate. Librarians may provide brief word list activities and spelling games using words in which the first letter begins with the theme letter. These may be take-home sheets or activities during the story hour.
- If you offer snacks, include foods spelled with the theme letter for the day.
- Send home activities sheets with the children, asking parents to have fun with their children by helping them find things that start with the theme letter.

Purposes

- The activity adds a brief but consistent literacy activity to regular story times.
- By focusing on one letter at a time, the activity helps children learn letters and letter sounds and identify items that have the letter sound.
- Children will become familiar with days of the week, and how a calendar works.
- This activity addresses phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary instruction.

Phyllis Harris, LIFT-Missouri

Three word and sound games to help new readers

Game One:

Choose a letter/sound to focus on. Use a deck of picture cards or a picture book showing words containing the target sound anywhere in the word. Instead of using pictures, you can call out words. Have the child tell you where in the word – beginning, middle, or end - the target sound occurs. The beginning sound is easiest and most often practiced, but the other two positions are important in distinguishing between words, too.

Game Two:

Make up games with word families. Word families are groups of words spelled and sounding the same except for one letter. The "all" family would be all, ball, call, fall, hall, mall, stall, tall, wall. The "ate" family would be ate, Kate, fate, hate, late, mate, Nate, rate. Words like cab, cad, Cal, can, cap, and cat, that change only at the end might also be considered a word family. So might cap, cop, cup. Word families are a device for practicing sound-letter combinations and for building confidence. Word families are helpful for phonemic awareness, spelling, word games, and practice for beginning or struggling readers. (There is a method of teaching reading, sometimes called the "linguistic method," based on such word families.)

Make a game out of seeing how many words in a word family the group can create (and laughing at the nonsense words that come along). Or let children take turns changing just one letter and calling out the new word. You will have to be prepared for some that break the rules and a few that we don't say in polite company, but just acknowledging both usually solves the problem. Word families might be considered "short cut phonics" since the child only has to contend with changing one sound at a time. They also help a child grasp the way sounds go together and shift within the language.

Game Three:

One of the problems with phonics is that it is almost impossible to produce a sound in English and say it without adding a vowel. So when we tell a child a word begins with "puh" it really doesn't, it begins with only the sound at the beginning of "puh." The new reader has to catch on to this blending of only the beginning bit of the sound and the smoothing out and stringing together of other bits of sound. So make an oral game out of blending these bits of sound. Say "puh-eh-t" and have the child guess the word "pet." Then let the child try out "duh-aw-g." and you guess "dog." A variation on this is "Whose name is it?" separating names of classmates or TV characters into their parts and having the children identify the real word.

This reinforces and demonstrates sounding out words and helps develop awareness of the sounds of the language. Start with one-syllable words; if the group seems to catch on move to more complicated words. At this point you are not writing or spelling the words, only dealing with the sounds. (English spelling does not help our literacy rate, but there is enough letter/sound correspondence to serve as a cuing system. Consonants are more regular than vowels.)

What libraries do for early elementary students in Missouri

A list of library literacy efforts, ideas, activities, and collaborations

Literacy efforts in Missouri's libraries are diverse, and they represent many kinds of service and literacy support. The ideas collected below come from libraries in Missouri, some are programs previously done, others are efforts in process, still others ideas are being developed. They are collected here as a catalogue of ideas that any other library in Missouri might borrow to increase library literacy efforts. The best ideas often come from the trenches!

- Tutoring school kids, either by individual volunteers or through formal homework helpers programs, is probably more common now than tutoring adults.
- A state representative visited, did a story time, and brought donated Scholastic books with him to give the attendees.
- Workshops like "Draw Your Own Comic Strip or Icky Science for Kids."
- Host a Read Across America event.
- A library purchases a book in honor of each kindergarten graduate, with special bookplates and a party; the honored child is the first to check out the book.
- Reading clubs/book groups after school (some with incentives through or support from local business).
- Spanish classes for kids (Other languages or topics work, too).
- Summer reading programs of various types, most often the Missouri State Library Program (Recreational reading builds literacy).
- A library allows daycares and summer camps sign kids up for summer reading, and works with daycare staff or camp counselors to help kids meet the goals.
- After-school programs come in on a regular schedule, or a library person goes to them with a reading-related activity on a regular schedule; sometimes this is done in collaboration with the school library.
- Winter reading programs (Use all those past summer reading manuals for ideas).
- Writing contest for kids or non-competitive young writers programs.
- Team reading events or contests that let struggling readers participate along with more fluent readers.

- Reading events or contests to be entered by a group of friends, or other groups, such as Brownie troops; this mixes struggling and fluent readers and makes the good readers peer group models while it lets slower readers get in on the fun.

- Acquiring materials that go with Accelerated Reader, Reading Recovery, etc., that are used in the local school; some headaches go with this, but it does get the kids who need to be reading to read and come to the library.

- Reading and other educational software available on computers.

- Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) programs; other reading encouragement or incentive programs.

- Home schooling programs and services.

- Activity alternatives to the television.

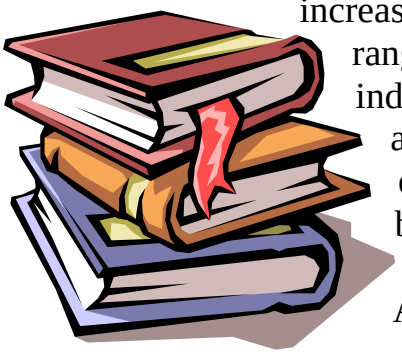
- Math materials/answers/games.

Reproducible Information

Choosing Children's Books for Different Ages and Stages
Early School Years

When children go to school, they want to learn about many different people and ideas. By now they may have memorized their favorite books and can recognize many different words. Because of the maturity of their brains, more complex behaviors occur. Socially, they enjoy playing with other children and can learn to work as a team. Because of this, their enjoyment of print can include many different activities, such as playing storekeeper or restaurant owner, post office, or scientist. Collections of books that support these activities enrich their experience.

During the early school years, children show tremendous growth in refined skills and memorization. For example, they can complete pencil mazes, begin creating their own stories, and remember up to five numbers in a row. Their attention span increases and they enjoy longer and longer stories on a wider range of subjects. This is the time when a child becomes an independent reader and it is important to keep reading aloud. Classic chapter books can be a pleasure for the entire family to read together. This age group likes joke books and silly stories. Easy how-to books with experiments or magic tricks may become inviting. Always remember to follow the child's interest.



Some tips for parents and other friendly adults:

Supporting Developing Readers

Keep reading aloud; most children can comprehend at a higher level than they can read well into middle school. Reading aloud helps make reading fun, gives families reasons to talk about things that matter to them, share experiences, and learn together.

There is ample evidence children get to be better readers simply by reading. So do what you can to increase the time they spend reading and their reasons to read.

Help surround children with books, magazines, and print material about their interests. There are several magazines for the early-middle reading level. Some children who won't read fiction will read non-fiction about subjects they like. When children only want to read one kind of book, realize they are building the reading skill they need to branch out later. Introduce them to different kinds of literature on the topic they are "stuck" on.

Computers motivate some children to read. There are necessary cautions about Internet use, but there are also kid-safe Web sites and software. After children read what is on the screen, you can guide them to other print materials about what they learned via computer.

Let children see you reading and writing. If they see that you value reading, writing, and knowledge, it demonstrates that literacy is "real world" and lifelong. In addition, you can read up on topics related to children's schoolwork and interests. You can read the same books they are reading. This lets you discuss what they like and are learning with them, and it gives them further reason to read and connect with what they are reading.

Help children become writers. Make books, preserve children's writings, encourage letters or e-mail with a known, safe adult or pen-pal, write notes and give children reason to write you notes, and add brief descriptions or written memories to the photos in your albums.

By late second or third grade, the school expects students will learn from what they read on their own. It's okay to read textbooks aloud with the children to help them grasp this special use of reading. Good informational readers ask questions, predict, change their predictions, connect what they read to what they already know, monitor their own comprehension, and organize information in their minds. You can model this behavior.

Some children who are physically active and high energy can read, but they don't accept sedentary activities well, so they don't spend time reading. For these students, find books and magazines about what they like, keep it pleasant, keep interest alive, and encourage them to read something even in short spurts so that skill continues to develop.

As school becomes more complex, adults may realize children aren't "getting" the reading process. If a child is still struggling with reading at third grade, it is high time for intervention. There are school programs, commercial programs, tutors, homework helpers, and probably other options. Keep your reading with the child affirming and happy. Sometimes it helps family relations to transfer the business of helping with reading to a tutor. Reading problems need to be dealt with, but if reading becomes misery or overwhelms the child's life, it won't help reading skill and other problems develop.

What parents can do while children are learning to read

Surround the child with books, magazines, and printed material about their interests and what they are studying. Enlist the help of other people in the child's life. There are numerous children's magazines for this early-middle reading level and sometimes they are more appealing to children than books. Lots of children who won't read fiction will read science and animal stories and sports books and other non-fiction at this stage. There are now picture books for older children. Children's Web sites can help, too.

Read up on topics related to children's schoolwork and their interests. If they see you value reading and knowledge, it demonstrates that reading is "real world" and lets you discuss what they like and are learning with them.

Keep reading aloud. It still helps make reading fun and it is usually good family time. Most children comprehend at a higher level than they read until well into middle school.

There is ample evidence children get to be better readers simply by reading. Do anything you can to just get them reading. Helping them write their ideas helps, too.

Even if students only want to read one kind of book or series at this point, humor them. They are building the reading skill they need to branch out later. If they are stuck on one topic, try connecting them with different kinds of literature on the topic.

By third grade the school moves away from teaching students to read and expects students to learn by reading on their own. Parents can read textbooks aloud to help children learn about this special use of reading. Good informational readers ask questions, predict, connect what they read to what they already know, monitor their own comprehension, and organize information in their minds. You can model this behavior.

Some children at this point are active and can read but don't. For these students use some of the tips above to keep reading pleasant and keep interest alive. But at some point parents may realize a child really can't handle the reading demands of the grade level. If a child is still struggling with reading processes at mid-second grade and there has been no special effort to help, it is time for intervention. Start with a discussion with the school. There are several options, and most schools have extra help of some kind. Meanwhile keep your reading with the child affirming and happy. If reading feels like punishment or loss, children won't read.

If your child has a reading problem, parents have two tasks that are equally important and hard to balance. First, you need to get some help for your child and figure out how to get the child to practice reading. Second, you must not let the reading problem overwhelm the child's life. Keep things the child is good at and enjoys an active part of his or her days. There is enough hard stuff at school for children who are poor readers; your job as a parent is to keep the child intact in spite of the reading problem.

Summer Reading – fun and more than fun

Each year, the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) does a study of education in the United States called "The Nation's Report Card." When the reading section for 2000 was released, once again, as in all previous years, the study found **children who report reading more pages daily, in and out of school, have higher scores on reading achievement.** Students who reported reading for fun every day had higher average scores than students who reported reading for fun less frequently.

Other experience and research continues to indicate that for many, perhaps most, learning the simple act of reading increases reading skill. As people read, they get better at it. That seems to be true at all levels and stages of reading development. Now researchers are suggesting the experience children have with books before they even enter school may be the deciding factor for how well they learn to read in the first place. In addition, the experience and incidental knowledge children gain from recreational reading increases their ability to comprehend what they read.

So – add to all the other benefits of a Summer Reading Program the knowledge that recreational readers become better readers. Children who are reading for fun at any level are becoming better readers.

Here is word about what parents can do over the summer to help reading achievement the rest of the year. Summer Reading Programs and other efforts that mix children and reading help children read better, learn more, and achieve in school. Even children who are struggling readers will benefit from the library's Summer Reading Program; perhaps struggling readers need it most of all. Debate continues about the best way to teach reading and remediate reading problems, but the research from every side of the debate agrees that recreational reading improves reading skill and motivates children to read. If children are spending time reading, they are becoming better readers!

Summer reading tips for parents of children who are learning to read

Summer Reading Programs are a great opportunity for your children to remember, practice, and enlarge their new reading skills. Although they may not be able to read everything they are interested in, the library has books they can read and others you and your children can read together. The library can help you surround your child with books of all kinds and find out which ones he or she likes best.

Explore and share the world of books for new readers. It's better than it ever has been. The popular Dr. Seuss books for new readers have been joined by many others. Some things that make a book good for new readers are: humor, patterns, illustrations, words that are easy but not so easy that the story gets lost, predictability, repetition, rhyme, large print, white space, and arrangement of the words on the page in meaning units.

For a lot of children, learning to read is hard work and they worry about it. They need adults who believe in them and pleasant reading experiences to motivate them to keep trying. Be very proud of every word the child learns and every sentence the child reads. Reassure the child that he or she is learning and we all learn a little at a time.

Have children read to you as often as possible keeping it as pleasant as possible. This may mean you take turns in the reading so the child doesn't get too tired. Children can also read to you or each other while you are preparing supper or folding laundry or in the car.

When you read aloud at the children's reading level, read to them with all the expression and appreciation you use for more complex stories. Children learn from this model.

Keep reading aloud; it bridges the gap. Reading aloud reminds children that reading is worth the effort, expands the world of books, and gives them something to aim for. Being read to is a pleasant activity in the midst of the stress of the new school situation. Children at this stage can comprehend much more than they can read. When you read to them mix things at their understanding level with things close to their reading level.

Point out words in the environment that the child can now read: *STOP, Mall, sale, in, out, push, pull, Pizza Hu*t. This is a lifelong use of reading and builds the child's confidence.

Add reading and word games to summer activities. There are commercial word games and computer games for new readers. You can modify other games into word games. Make sets of "Go Fish" card games where the match is words in different typefaces (do you have a "go"?). Make concentration games where the match is a word in capitals and a word in lower case or a picture and a word. Replace the cards in *Candyland* with cards that have the words for the colors or the chart in *Cootie* with one that says "leg" instead of the picture. If new and more experienced readers are playing a game together, alter the scoring in traditional word games such as *Scrabble* and go for the total group score, or try to hit a certain family group score by a certain date. You can also have children play in teams with new and more experienced readers together on the same team.

Dolch List

The Dolch reading list contains the 220 most commonly used words in English reading and writing. This version of the list is arranged from most used to less used words. These words should be so familiar to children that they can read them automatically.

the	I	was	for
to	you	said	on
and *	it *	his #	they
he #	of	that #	but #
a	in *	she #	had #
at *	look #	out	we #
him #	is #	as	am *
with	her	be #	then #
up *	there	have	little
all *	some	go #	down #
do	what	get #	my #
can #	so	them	would
could	see #	like #	me #
when #	not #	one	will #
did #	were	this	yes
big #	now #	very	ride #
went #	long #	an *	into
are	no #	over	just #
come	came #	your	blue
if	ask *	its	red #
from	want	put	every
good	don’t	too	pretty
any	how #	got #	jump #
about	know	take #	green
around	right	where	four
away	saw #	ran #	sleep
old *	call #	let #	brown
by	after	help	yellow
their	well #	make #	five #
here	think #	going	six #
walk	again	stop #	cold #
to	play #	off	today
or	who	never	fly
before	been	seven	myself
eat *	may	eight	around

tell #	first	black #	goes
much	try	white #	write #
keep	new	ten #	always
give	must	does	drink #
work	start #	bring #	once
soon #	has	our	warm
made	find #	better	ate *
run #	only	hold #	full
gave	us *	buy	those
open	three	funny	done
use	hurt	sit #	under
fast #	pull	which	read
say #	cut #	fall #	why
light #	kind #	carry	own
pick #	booth	small #	found #
wash	live #	upon	thank #
show	draw #	these	wish #
hot #	clean	sing #	many
because	grow #	together	shall
far #	best #	please	laugh

* root word for a family such as and, band, hand, etc.

\# part of a group of words with similar patterns, part of a word family such as an man, can, ran, etc.

Using this list

Since these are words children will see frequently and need to be able to read, they are a good word bank for words for flashcards and word games. Commonly used words such as these are often irregular in spelling and children need to make them "sight words," that is, words a reader simply recognizes without having to actively sound out or decode them.

The annotations have been added to this copy of the list to help you group words by sound patterns and add other words to them for games and activities that build on the sound and spelling patterns that are becoming familiar to children through learning the words on the list.

The * indicates that by adding letters in front of this small word you can build others on the same pattern. For example, by putting letters in front of "old" you can generate bold, cold, fold, gold, hold, mold, sold, and told. The * beside "in" tells you that it is a syllable that you can use to generate bin, fin, gin, kin, pin, Rin Tin Tin, sin, tin, win. The symbol # tells you the word is part of a group on the same pattern but not the root syllable. For example, "far" can be grouped with bar, jar, par, star, spar, and tar. Fast can be grouped with blast, cast, last, mast, and past.

Working Together
to Grow Children who Love Literacy

A reproducible booklet for parents and librarians, by Jacque Wuertenberg

About Reading:

At home and at the library we can work together to encourage the same literacy strategies. Youngsters need to hear that reading and writing are important! Youngsters need to hear this from many different people both at home and at the library.

The important people at home and at the library can make a difference. You are where the action is. You know or can find out what youngsters are interested in and what they care about. That's also the easiest thing to write about. If you have a dinosaur specialist or a baseball lover, use this information to help your youngster get started writing. Encourage reading and writing on topics of interest: the family dog, the solar system, horses, soccer, etc. Help youngsters find books to read on these topics. Note: Avid readers know where to find their favorite books. A fifth grader in Toronto said,

"I can take you to the section in the library about "wolves" with my eyes closed. That's how much I like wolves!"

Read aloud to youngsters even when they can read on their own. Your read-aloud voice and time you spend says to the youngster, "I care enough about you to spend this uninterrupted time reading aloud to you just so we can be together." Here are some dependable choices for read-aloud books:

- Favorite authors.
- Topics of interest to a child.
- Your favorite growing-up books.

Don't hesitate to read these favorites again and again. Children love repetition and often ask, "Read it again." Children gain confidence in knowing they know what is happening in a favorite book. "After all," a youngster told me, "We don't eat spaghetti once." Some of us enjoy seeing old movies, singing favorite songs, hearing often-told family tales, working in the garden, fishing, or watching baseball again and again. Bill Martin Jr. says that we often stay with a book for as long as that book has a message for us. A favorite book of mine is Margery

Williams' story of *The Velveteen Rabbit.* If we are together, sooner or later, I'll read the part to you where the skin horse is talking to the velveteen rabbit about what it means to become "real." My daughter often said, "It hasn't been easy growing up in this house and hearing *The Velveteen Rabbit* read aloud so often." A friend suggested I send her a copy of the book when she went away to school. My daughter said she read the book to her roommate before she went to sleep. Youngsters hold onto the things that have been given to them by people who are important to them. Reading aloud is a gift that keeps on giving.

Also, read aloud your youngster's own writing. Think of someone you know you can depend on, find that person or call that person on the phone, and read aloud a favorite piece that a youngster has written. Do this while the youngster is nearby and can hear what you are saying. The message youngsters get is that what they write is important enough for you to share it with another person. Do this often and your youngster will want to write more and more.

Read aloud favorite poems and rhymes. Check the children's section of your library for poetry books on favorite topics. Compilers such as Lee Bennett Hopkins and Eloise Greenfield have gathered poems on subjects children want to read about. Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends* has some of my favorites including: "Sarah, Sylvia, Cynthia Stout wouldn't take the garbage out. . . ." The rhythm, rhyme and repetition provide youngsters with the opportunity to reinforce what they already know and to play with language. When you are reading aloud, pause before a key word (often a noun or a word at the end of a phrase) and encourage youngsters to finish it with you. For example, when you share the old favorite, "I Never Saw a Purple Cow," pause after you have read it several times and your youngster will join you in saying "cow." In addition, Dennis Lee says in his book, *Alligator Pie,* that children will inadvertently put their own words in when they catch the rhythm and rhyme of a verse that has been read aloud. This is one of the first steps in youngsters seeing themselves actively involved in the reading process.

About Writing:

Invite your youngster to draw before writing. Most youngsters are told to write, and then if they have time they may draw. Art can be a catalyst for writing and often encourages a writer to add details. Encourage this process by setting up a "Make-It Box" supplied with a variety of art materials:

- Old magazines, leftover cloth, ribbons, etc. for collage.

- Stamp pads for thumb printing.
- Straws and food coloring for straw blowing.
- Different colors, sizes, and kinds of papers for writing.

After a youngster has drawn, encourage elaboration by asking, "What is happening in your picture? Tell me more about it." With younger children, listen for a word, phrase or sentence that describes the picture and write it down on a peel-off label that can be placed on the piece of art. Your child now has a titled picture.

As you listen to youngsters occasionally say, "Tell me that again. It is so well said that I want to write it down." Become a scribe and take dictation. Write down exactly what is being said, word for word. Read it back and ask the writer if you have transcribed it correctly. Remember:

Writing is composing – thinking of the idea.
Transcribing is putting the idea into print.

Don't feel guilty when you are transcribing. Why would you? You are providing youngsters with the message that writing is for reading. Youngsters soon choose to pick up a pencil and continue writing, with the assurance you will want to read this next piece too.

Encourage youngster to write their reading experiences and to write about family happenings. Here are some books that will help you get started:

The Important Book by Margaret Wise Brown
The important thing about grandpa is…
The important thing about my dog is…
The important thing about *Charlotte's Web* is…

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day By Judith Viorst
A book about the everyday nuisances we all know.

If It Weren't For You by Charlotte Zolotow
Sibling rivalry with a happy ending.

Someday by Charlotte Zolotow
A book of wishes and dreams. Invite each family member to add a page. Imagine what the family pets might say and add a pet's page too

Talk about yourself as a writer. Say aloud, "I am writing this grocery list. I am writing a note to grandma. I am writing this recipe. I am writing this idea down so that I don't forget it." Keep a day book, a blank book with a spiral binding that opens flat. Use different colors and play with space and the way you write the words. Use your day book as a repository for things that are important to you. Add:

- Quotes about favorite things and from favorite people.
- Thoughts you may want to later develop.
- Moments and notions you want to hold onto.
- Favorite lines from songs, movies and books.

Record youngsters' words in your day book also. Children become so excited when someone is interested in an idea that they have that they will want to show others that they are included in your day book. "Scrap booking" fans understand how much fun it is to give presence and quality to a snapshot with background papers. Have fun with your day book. Add a border, matte and mount a favorite poem and collage several photos together by overlapping the edges. Consider a "Summer Reading Day Book" with passages from favorite books.

Write notes to youngsters. Here's a note writing story from a mother and her twelve-year old son:

Carol began to write notes to her twelve year old in the hope he would answer her. On the first day, she wrote, "I've hidden two cookies. Your Mom. P.S. Here's a hint. They're in your closet under that pile of dirty clothes."
He wrote, "Dear Mom, I found the cookies, but I didn't find the clothes. Your son."

At home, include notes in lunchboxes, under pillows, taped to mirrors, and on the refrigerator door. At the library, consider asking youngsters to write notes about favorite books for the next reader to find. Write encouraging messages and messages inviting youngsters to respond. Sometimes it is easier to say things in writing than to speak them.

A friend of mine said he had lost his temper and swatted his five year old before he left to go out for dinner. When he returned, there was a note on his pillow from his son that said, "You not only hurted me on my bottom, you hurted me in my heart."

Set up a writing and publishing center at home and in the library. Provide materials to help writing and publishing. Include:

- Paper
- Cardboard for book covers
- Wallpaper and contact paper to make book covers
- Blank books
- Different size tablets
- Binders with clear protective sheets, making instant books (Get binders with a plastic front for the book title.)
- Small photo packets (Put photo on one side and place the writing opposite.)
- Yarn, curtain hooks, and shoestrings to hold books together
- Stapler

Steven used 29 staples to staple the eight-page car book he had just written. Children soon learn that pages in a book have to be securely put together or they will fall apart with frequent readings. Feature homemade books on the coffee table or wherever prized possessions are kept. Create a separate shelf in the library to feature new writers. Add a page at the back of the book titled, "Readers' Comments." Invite friends and family members to add encouraging content comments and read these aloud also.

Jacque Wuertenberg, author of this booklet, is a Missourian, a language arts consultant, a friend of all libraries, a professor, and a parent.

After you read to your children, try these other ideas to help them read well

Bonus:
Some of them let an adult have hands busy with other tasks at the same time!

- Remember books on tape for trips, long commutes, and busy times like while you are fixing supper.
- Put magnetic letters on the refrigerator or a metal board or cabinet.
- Play alphabet games; there are commercial ones, or make your own.
- Look for letters and read signs while riding in the car.
- Keep books in the car for commutes or a quick read while waiting in the car or in a waiting room.
- Since many schools are now using phonics as the basis of reading instruction, one of the most important things we can do for kids at this stage is help them get used to language sounds and the way sounds combine in words. Turn these into word games. (Do this early while kids still tolerate silliness.)
- Play with rhyming words. "Cat, cat –what rhymes with cat? That fat rat sat." "Ball, ball what rhymes with ball? All, small, tall, Paul." Yes there are a few we don't say in polite company and you will have to tell the child that. And you will get nonsense words, but this makes it fun. The point of this game is getting good at the sounds of English, not learning words.
- Another game that helps children get ready to read is to verbalize the sounds in a word and then blend them into the word itself. The game goes like this: "Guess this word." One player (the adult) says the sounds that make up a word: *f-ih-sh* and the other player (the child) guesses the word: *fish!* Try others*: st-ah-p Stop! B-aw-l Ball! S-ah-ul-eee Sally!* After a child gets good at this, the players can take turns. You recognize this game as practice in sounding out words.
- Another good word game: Can you think of words that start like zoo? Zip, zipper, Zoë, zing. How about words that end like Zoo? Sue, blue, too, you. (Yes, the spelling is different, which is why at this step you are only doing this orally.) Be sure to include more than beginning sounds, since all the sounds in a word are important.

- Get the library habit now – let the whole family get it.
- Tell stories and have conversations; this if the kind of language that is in the books children meet at school.
- Extend what you read in books; make soup after you read about soup, read about tractors or seeds during planting season, add books to the holidays or life events, use books to back up your family's beliefs and cultural traditions.
- Puppets and impromptu drama extend the meanings of books and expand the child's language skills and sense of word play.
- Help children write. Reading and writing are two ends of the same process, and doing on helps the other.
- Take dictation and have your child watch as his/her language turns into print. Then read it back and help the child read or recite it back. This is an important experience. (Later while the child illustrates what you wrote down, you can be doing another task)
- Make books of all kinds. (This helps with reading and writing – and later these books are family treasures.) Staple pages, sew pages, use notebook rings, write in cheap blank books, illustrate tiny books with stickers, and glue words on fancy paper. Make up stories, illustrate songs or rhymes, make your own alphabet books, or use a favorite book as a pattern. If your child thinks of himself/herself as a writer he/she is more likely to be a reader.
- Make books to tell grandparents or adult friends about what is going on in your life. Homemade books can remember vacations or special events. (Later they become family treasures.)
- As children get older you can talk about what might have happened in a book or what a character should have done or what might happen next. Then you can even help children write a sequel or an alternative story. They can illustrate independently.
- Write things and let your child see you writing.
- Help your child write things: lists, notes, letters, reminders, cards. Use post-it notes, fancy paper, colored pens, or anything to make writing and illustrating a neat experience.

What do they mean by that?
Words Reading Teachers Use

Decoding: Decoding is the process of figuring out what words the letters on the page stand for. Decoding involves some comprehension or understanding of the message also. Occasionally a reader can say written words without meaning attached and this is often called "word calling."

Comprehension: It is necessary to know or figure out what word printed letters represent, but the real point of reading is to understand what the author is saying and construct some kind of meaning from it. Comprehension is the process of understanding what the passage says and constructing meaning from the message.

Fluency: Fluency is how smoothly and quickly a reader reads, how well words and sentences flow together almost automatically so a reader can get the meaning of a text. A reader who is fluent reads smoothly and makes it sound easy or skillful. Sometimes readers who are not fluent concentrate so much on trying to put the words together, they have trouble understanding what they read. Readers who do not develop fluency generally struggle and have trouble understanding.

Context: Context is what is around the words and sentences that help the reader make sense of them. A "field" in a book about Old MacDonald will be different from a "field" in a book about careers. A cookbook is read differently from a road sign or a storybook. In books for beginning readers the pictures are often important context. The context of an unfamiliar word may help a reader figure out what the word is or what an unfamiliar word means.

Phonemic awareness: A phoneme is the smallest sound unit of language that makes one word different from another. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear these small sounds and understand how they blend into words and sentences and how the words change when the phonemes change. For example, phonemic awareness would help a reader hear that *pin* is different from *bin* by one sound, that *cut* can change to *cup*, how *back* is different from both *bake* and *black*, that *red* is partly like and partly unlike *rod*, and *moved* is *move* with an added sound. Phonemic awareness is one of the "hot" topics in reading instruction, and both argument and study on the topic continue. Some researchers hold that poor phonemic awareness may explain why some learners cannot "sound out" words or use phonics very well.

Word families: This phrase means several things, but usually in beginning reading it means a group of words spelled and sounding the same except for one letter. The "all" family would be *all, ball, call, fall, hall, mall, stall, tall, wall*. The "ate" family would be *ate, Kate, fate, hate, late, mate, Nate, rate, slate, Tate*. Words like *cab, cad, Cal, can, cap, and cat*, might also be considered a word family. So might *cap, cop, cup*. Word families are a device for practicing sound-letter combinations and for building confidence. Word families are helpful for phonemic awareness, decoding, spelling, word games, and practice for beginning or struggling readers. (There is a method of teaching reading, sometimes called the "linguistic" method, based on such word families.)

Language experience: Language experience is an approach to teaching reading based on activities and stories developed from experiences of the learner. The learner dictates a story about personal experiences to the teacher. The teacher writes down the story as the learner watches. Then student and teacher read the story together and do activities based on the story until the learner associates the written form of the word with the spoken. Language experience is often used with struggling readers, and it blends well with other methods. Parents can use it to help children make books and keep journals.

Phonics: Phonics is a method that directly teaches beginning readers the relation of letters to sounds. This is usually what teachers mean when they talk about "sounding out" words**:** knowing what sound each letter stands for and then blending those sounds to make words. Readers must be able to do this easily and quickly, so they don't lose the meaning of the passage in an effort to figure out what the words are. The irregularity of English spelling is a problem in phonics instruction, but consonants are mostly regular and more syllables are regular than irregular.

Whole language: "Whole language" can mean different things to different people. It is more like a philosophy than a method. In reading it insists on keeping language "whole"; that is, not breaking it up into skills and exercises and artificially written lessons. It also insists on "authentic" texts and activities such as real storybooks, letters, and journals rather than worksheet exercises a child would see only in school. It is sometimes controversial, but many publishers of reading and writing materials have modified their approaches to reflect the whole language philosophy and include whole language activities. It is not the same as the "look-say" method, which relies on memorizing words, although some people confuse the two.

Grade level: Through the years, educators have looked at how children in certain grades perform academically and have set standards for how children in a certain grade ought to be able to perform to keep up with the progress the system expects and to not fall behind academic expectations. Grade level is usually determined by a standardized test or by how well a student handles academic tasks at that grade level.

Standardized test/measure: Standardized tests have been given to a very large sample group and the standards for certain age or grade levels are set by analyzing the way this large group achieved on the test. Then the people who take the test afterward are placed and evaluated on the basis of the standard set by that group. The tests must be given the same way every time and the answers must always be scored the same way for this system to work. To make this happen, the tests themselves are usually multiple choice or some other closed answer system. Standardized tests are usually paper and pencil, teachers cannot help while students take them, and they are scored with a key or by machine. They yield scores like grade levels that let schools compare an individual's score to the standards set earlier, and also make it possible to compare the performance of a group at one school with another school or schools.

Informal reading assessment: A teacher or counselor may listen to a child read and make observations and evaluations about how the child reads and perhaps how the child reads in relation to other children of the same grade or age. Informal assessments are usually done one-

to-one, and there is interaction between the child and the person doing the test. Informal reading assessment is focused on the individual and the reading behaviors the tester observes. It is usually done for the purpose of trying to figure out what the strengths and weaknesses of an individual are in relation to reading. It may also be done to gain extra information in addition to the scores of a standardized test, or to get a feel for whether standardized test scores accurately reflects a student's reading ability.

Miscue analysis: Miscue analysis is an informal assessment technique from the whole language framework helping teachers look at the reading process of an individual student. Working either from a tape of the student reading, or working live with the student, the examiner makes a series of coded marks on a copy of the text the student is reading as the student reads. The teacher marks miscues such as substituted words, repeated words, self-corrections missed words and many others.

Invented spelling: Children (and adults!) often write words the way they sound according to their understanding of how letters and sounds work together. "Correct" English spelling is often so irregular, it may distract learners in the early stages of literacy. Allowing children or new readers to use invented, inferred, or "best guess" spelling as they write lets them use their energy for the writing process and think about what they have to say rather than limiting their writing to words they can spell. It also gives them practice with sound-letter relationships. When Standard English spelling is necessary, words are revised and corrected through the editing process and through direct spelling instruction. Looking at a student's invented spelling often provides good clues to how the student understands the sounds and letters of written English. Research hasn't arrived at a good answer to why some people are naturally good spellers and others are not. It is probably related to a combination of phonemic awareness and visual memory.

The Reading-Writing Connection

Writing and reading are two ends of the same process. Help children become writers. It really will help them become readers.

Write down stories as they dictate. Let them watch as their speech becomes writing from your pen; this is an important transformation. Then read together the passage they have dictated until they can read it easily. You can keep a notebook of these stories. Read them over again from time to time. Some may be special enough to illustrate and share.

Help children make their own books. Inspiration can come from commercial books. Ideas abound: think of alphabet books, made-up stories, information about a topic, holidays, song lyrics, imitations of published books, an experience or adventure, and on and on. Children can illustrate their books by drawing, painting, paper cutting, with magazine pictures, clip art, or photographs. Laminating the pages or using poster board to make the final copy makes the book sturdier. Then you can help the young authors bind the books with notebook rings, yarn, staples, brads, or other ingenious solutions. You might even pay a photocopy center to bind special efforts.
Your group might pair with a teacher whose class makes books and host an authors' party or pay to have a class anthology photocopied and bound.

Children can compose poems, remembrances, or short essays and frame them as gifts, awards, or bulletin board pieces.

Worrying too much about standard spelling and grammar in the first draft seems to interfere with creativity in young writers, but teaching the revising and editing process is a realistic activity. The "publishing" process is a good place to teach standard spelling and grammar.

Help children make notebooks or scrapbooks of photos, clippings, programs, cards, or even assignments and ads that reflect their lives. Then help them annotate or caption what they choose to paste into the notebooks.

Set up written correspondence with a child or a group of children via notes, postcards, and letters, through a special mailbox in a classroom, or by becoming a mystery correspondent who leaves notes and asks for responses. Safe e-mail exchanges are also a great tool to get children writing.